

Checking up on Canada's top kids

Every year, kidsworld is thrilled to celebrate Canadian kids who are making a difference in their schools and communities through our Student of the Year Awards. And we know you get inspired by reading about all they've accomplished--whether it's by developing video games or raising funds for needy families. But do you ever wonder where the winners are now?

Stop guessing--kidsworld caught up with the 2007 Student of the Year winners to find out just that.

What's Next for ... Taylor?

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Ever wonder what makes a leader? Just ask Bowmanville's Taylor Hughes, winner of the 2007 Subway Leadership Award. Taylor's list of accomplishments, which includes volunteer work for organizations ranging from the YWCA to the Angel Hair for Kids program would be impressive on an adult. For a twelve-year-old, it's downright outstanding. Still, when Taylor got the news that she would appear in kidsworld, her response was like that of any kid. "I was very, very, very excited," she gushes. "Not only did I win a scholarship, but my picture was put in your magazine!"

In the spirit of leadership, Taylor saw her achievement as an opportunity to inspire other kids to help improve their own communities "I feel children will learn that you don't have to be the strongest, toughest, or smartest to make a difference," Taylor told kidsworld. "For example anyone can bring in an unused coat for a child who needs one. Or even give a good handshake to an opponent after a game."

Since winning the Subway Leadership award, Taylor has continued to raise awareness about issues ranging from poverty to cancer by encouraging her family members and friends to make small, manageable contributions to charities such as the Salvation Army. "I have a goal of getting at least two of my friends to donate their toys and clothes to a local shelter," she explains. Eventually, Taylor hopes for a bigger audience: "I would like to be a teacher and community volunteer. I want to work with children, helping them through school and to also give my time to help local non-profits," she says.

Spoken like a true leader.

For more info on Angel Hair for kids, visit www.achildsvoicefoundation.com

What's Next For ... Sam?

Organizing food drives. Coaching soccer. Adopting families. It's all in a day's work for Halifax's Sam Nielsen, winner of 2007's Student of Year Community Award and all-round philanthropy phenom "I think my parents did a good thing by helping me getting

me started at my age with helping out others," Sam says.

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Regardless of the reason, Sam is definitely getting noticed for her community spirit. Last year, kidsworld was impressed with Sam's contributions to the non-profit organization Feed Nova Scotia, through which individuals can "adopt" needy families by providing them with food and other essential items. For Sam, the adoption process took a bit of creative thinking and more than a little hard work: "I raised funds by having yard sales, recycling, donating the money I won from an essay contest, and putting in a part of my own allowance," Sam explains. "I was surprised how many people stepped up and gave as well."

A year later, and Sam shows no signs of slowing down. Now in Grade Seven, Sam is raising even more money for Feed Nova Scotia while also collecting items for a local teen shelter and taking on coaching responsibilities for a soccer club. "I've been lucky to do well in soccer, so I thought it might be nice to give back," Sam says. "Now I help out once a week. I love it!"

What's Next For ... Aaron?

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"Next year, I'm going to Middle School for Grade Six and I can't wait to play on all the school sports teams," says Aaron Ogrnodick, a Grade Five student in The Pas, Manitoba. Lucky school: Aaron, a star player on the AA team The Pas Huskies, is the proud--and deserving--recipient of numerous sports awards, including the Esso Medallion for Sportsmanship and kidsworld's 2007 Student of the Year Top Athlete award. In fact, with a growing list of accomplishments, Aaron's become something of a local sports celebrity!

"I had my picture in the paper and big article in the paper telling all about the award I had won," Aaron reports. "It was really cool." A team player at heart, Aaron credits his success less to his talent than to a real love of the game. "I try my best and I'm a good sport. My phys. ed. teacher says I have a great attitude when it comes to playing different sports at school." An attitude Aaron thinks other kids can get in on: "If you have a chance to try out every sport, make sure you do because you never know which one you will like or be good at. It's also good for your body and lots of fun."

Speaking of fun, Aaron's not just about athletics. When it comes to down time, he's a regular kid ... albeit still a sports-obsessed one. "I like to play video games on my computer and my PlayStation Portable--my favorite games are NHL 08 and Hotshots Golf."

What's Next For ... Sarthak?

Think you love video games? So does Sarthak Malik, a Grade Eight student

from Maple, Ontario. But he isn't just playing them ... he's making them! "I developed a great interest in video games by the age of six", reports Sarthak, the winner of 2007's Microsoft Young Innovator award. "Since then, I've been continuously learning and mastering the subject." And master it he did: while still in Grade Seven, Sarthak developed a unique "game pack" of challenging games for PC platforms that he sold on his own website.

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As with many of our past Student of the Year winners, being profiled in kidsworld was just the beginning of Sarthak's journey to success. "It felt amazing to win", Sarthak beams. "I've gained the confidence to participate in further competitions." And, apparently, the confidence to fly. Since his appearance in kidsworld, Sarthak's been pursuing his long-held interest in airplanes, attending a workshops at the Toronto Aerospace Museum and participating in a "Pilot for a Day" program at the Buttonville Airport in Toronto. "I'd like to become an Aerospace Engineer/Space scientist and work for NASA while continuing in the field of computer science," he says. "I'd also like to develop animation film with a unique cartoon character."

Whether he's the next Nell Armstrong or the next Bill Gates, something tells us that Sarthak's future will definitely be out of this world.

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What's Next For ... Geena?

When you think of a top student, who do you picture? A math whiz? A sports hero? How about ... a painter? Winner of the 2007 Crayola Visual Arts award Geena Sipkema, who wowed kidsworld staffers with her poetry and her imaginative drawings of unicorns, flowers, and friends, proves that you can't spell "smart" without "art." Good thing she was as inspired by her Student of the Year award as we were by her. "I couldn't believe that kidsworld had chosen me," Geena confides. "Not only was I thrilled, but I was proud of my accomplishments as well."

But for this 14-year-old New Brunswick native, winning was just icing on the cake. Geena loves everything creative, from playing violin to writing poetry to acting. But while art may be the most important part of her life, it's far from everything! "I'm also in karate and I occasionally horse back ride," says Geena. "Swimming, rock climbing, acting and singing are four of my other passions as well."

Her advice for finding your own inner artist? "Find out what interests you and go for it! Sometimes it may take a while to find something that you really love but never forfeit the game! If you reach for the top and never give up on something you want, unbelievable things can occur."

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